



The Divided Buddhists Of South Vietnam

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NO MORE WELCOME political news has come out of Vietnam than Thich Tam Chau's decision to resign his high post in the Unified Buddhist Church after playing the key role in averting a disastrous and irreparable break between the church and the government. He has thus isolated the extremists and opened the way for the creation of a new moderate Buddhist base in Saigon which may prove of incalculable importance in the September election.

One of the most persistent myths in South Vietnam is that since the downfall of the Diem régime the Buddhists have become so strong and unified that no other force in the country, including the Vietcong, is proof against them. While it is true that militant monks rule the Buddhists of central Vietnam, command a large following among Vietnamese students, and have succeeded in creating political fanaticism out of religious fervor, the movement is anything but united. Nothing in Vietnam is more illuminating or, under the circumstances, more surprising than a close examination of the politics of Buddhism.

Until 1964, Vietnam's largest and most important Buddhist organization was the General Buddhist Association of Vietnam. It consisted of three communities of monks and three lay associations for northern, central, and southern Vietnam, with the "northern" component mainly

composed of refugees or former residents of North Vietnam. Although the Buddhists in general strenuously resented their inferior role vis-à-vis the Catholics during the Diem régime, little was heard of their association until May 8, 1963, when eight Buddhists were killed by government troops in a demonstration outside the radio station in Hué.

THE INCIDENT, which precipitated the Buddhist campaign leading to the downfall of President Ngo Dinh Diem, was set off by an inflammatory speech by Thich Tri Quang, one of the leaders of the association, which the Hué authorities had refused to rebroadcast on the radio. It was followed the next day by an equally strong letter to all Buddhist monks, nuns, and laymen signed by Thich Tam Chau, head of the association's northern section. He wrote that "In recent years, we Buddhists . . . have been buried alive, slandered, exiled, jailed, persecuted, insulted. . . . Let us be united in determination. Let tens of thousands of men act like a single man. Let us be ready to protect our religion and to die for our religion. . . . We must be ready to put on the robe, join hands, look up to the Buddha, and take long strides on the road to martyrdom."

To co-ordinate their efforts, the Buddhists formed the Intersect Committee for the Defense of Buddhism to act as the sole spokesman for the various Buddhist associations

then involved in negotiations with the Diem government. Leading the committee were Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau.

In those fevered months when the Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon became national headquarters for this early struggle movement, the monks learned a great deal about political power and its manipulation. The guns of the generals finally ended the Diem régime, but it was the work of the monks that made the coup possible. Almost overnight they emerged as a major political force, and it soon became clear that, having tasted power, they were of no mind to return to the serenity of the pagodas and their lives of meditation and prayer.

Two months later, the monks were ready to advance a step further. In January, 1964, against the protests of many leading Buddhist laymen, they created the Unified Buddhist Church, consisting of fourteen of the country's sixteen Buddhist sects. In vain the laymen appealed to Thich Tinh Khiet, the Supreme Venerable of the General Buddhist Association, who, now in his eighties, neither reads nor writes the romanized Vietnamese language but only the ancient Chu Nom script, which has not been in general use since the fifteenth century. But the monks had the ear of the Supreme Venerable. He did not respond to the laymen's protests that the Unified Buddhist Church's creation and character had been decided without consulting them or to their charges that the monks were breaking their vows of poverty and using expensive cars and air conditioners. In retaliation the monks dissolved the laymen's association in central Vietnam, and shocked them anew with talk of violent demonstrations.

Propagandizing the Faith

The two main branches of the Unified Buddhist Church were put under the direction of the same two monks who began the agitation against Diem. One branch, the Institute for the Clergy, was run by Tri Quang, and the secular arm, the Institute for the Propagation of the Faith, by Tam Chau. This led to a profoundly significant division within the Buddhist movement. It also led to the re-

vival, in opposition to the Unified Buddhist Church, of the General Association of Buddhism, which optimistically claims a million adherents, and the Association of Studies of Buddhism, which has a membership of intellectuals and senior Buddhist laymen and monks. However, since these groups believe that Buddhism as such should play no part in the political affairs of the state, their opposition to the political machinations of the Unified Buddhist Church is passive and ineffective.

The Institute for the Propagation of the Faith, or Vien Hoa Dao, is housed in a group of wooden barracks near the outskirts of Saigon adjoining the Allied military headquarters. It was built on a former dump, and the surroundings are squalid. Yet cabinet ministers, generals, diplomats, and businessmen regularly pass through its gates to seek advice or make deals. It has become both a marketplace and a pressure point. Hard bargains have been struck over cabinet positions and much money has changed hands there. Governments that fell out with the Buddhists eventually were themselves brought down.

The Vien Hoa Dao, organized into departments such as education, youth, laymen, propaganda, social and cultural affairs, and finance, is the Buddhist government. If its plans materialize, it could some day take over every cabinet post in South Vietnam. Premier Nguyen Cao Ky is well aware that his real battle with the Vien Hoa Dao has just begun.

"I was approached by certain venerables who agreed to stop agitation in exchange for key jobs for Buddhists in my cabinet," Ky said in Danang on May 18. "'Stay in power, you have our confidence,' these people said. And now they are attacking me. Their plan was clear. They wanted the Ministries of Information, Interior, and Defense so they could control the elections."

IN TERMS of present political organization, the most important portfolio in the Vien Hoa Dao is that of Commissioner of Youth, a post presently filled by Tri Quang's principal lieutenant, a notoriously corrupt monk named Thich Thien

Minh, who on June 1 was severely wounded by a grenade thrown at his car. Thien Minh is an excellent speaker, a good organizer, and an experienced negotiator. He fought with the Vietminh against the French in central Vietnam, and was arrested as a Vietminh activist in 1950. After that war he is believed to have had connections with the Vietcong and worked in an area under Vietcong domination. In Saigon he has surrounded himself with young monks brought from Hué. Many of the novice monks are believed to be Vietcong sympathizers. Needing no identity cards, students in political difficulty can shave their heads, don a monk's robe, and find a ready refuge in the pagodas. The Badan Pagoda on the outskirts of Saigon is used quite openly by Vietcong returning from Zone D, one of their main bases northwest of the capital.

The education portfolio in the Vien Hoa Dao is also held by a follower of Tri Quang, Thich Minh Chau. His younger brother was an attaché in the North Vietnamese embassy in Peking in 1963 when Minh Chau attended a Buddhist congress there. He is not regarded as sympathetic to the Vietcong, however, and is even considered right-wing by Tri Quang's standards.

Despite the presence of such Tri Quang men in his organization, Tam Chau still controlled the Vien Hoa Dao. He had the backing of perhaps a million refugees and migrants from the North, where he was born in 1921. Tam Chau told me that he had been imprisoned by the Vietminh for three years. During the war against the French he worked with the Catholics in the southern Red River Delta as a chairman of the Religious League Against Communism. While he describes himself only as non-Communist, his associates say that he is vigorously anti-Communist. During one of several interviews I have had with him in recent years, he attacked the concept of neutrality as a solution to Vietnam's problems. "We just have to look at Laos," he said, "to see what neutrality can mean."

These are the two main and contending factions. There are also a number of uncommitted elements. One favors a neutralist policy; an-

other is headed by Thich Quang Lien, who was educated at Yale and who has been interested at times in pushing peace moves. And finally there are the Theravada Buddhists. They have two principal leaders, one of whom is now vice-chairman of the Vien Hoa Dao and the other chief of the department of laymen and leader of the army chaplains. Late in May the support of all these groups was with Tam Chau.

POLITICS in the Vien Hoa Dao has been consistently bitter since its founding in 1964. Tri Quang, who had decided that Tam Chau was weak and pliable, supported his election as chairman and he has never ceased to regret it. At that time, the Unified Buddhist Church monks were unanimous in agreeing that Vietnam should become a Buddhist state and that other religions should be banned. Six months later, realizing the divisive effects such a program would have on the broader political scene, Tam Chau changed his mind and decided to work merely for Buddhist leadership in a society that would also find a place for the Christians and the sects. Tri Quang has never forgiven him. "Tri Quang may say he wants to make friends with other religions, but this is not true," Buddhists told me. "He believes he can turn all of Vietnam, including the North, into a Buddhist state that he will dominate."

A year after the first election, Tri Quang wanted to replace Tam Chau as chairman with his own chief lieutenant, Thien Minh, but he could not round up a majority. One way or another, Tam Chau kept his post until his resignation on June 3 and until recently had successfully beaten off Tri Quang's attempts to extend his Hué-based political organization to Saigon.

The fight between the two factions has often been vicious, not merely within the Vien Hoa Dao but in the national political arena as well. In return for Tri Quang's promise of support in the 1965 Vien Hoa Dao elections, Tam Chau agreed to back his plans for a new party, at first called the Force of Vietnamese Socialist Buddhists and later shortened by dropping the word "Socialist." Although it was to be an official Vien Hoa Dao party,

Tam Chau's laymen were barred from the first meeting. Tam Chau reacted by instructing his ally, the Commissioner for Laymen, to form a separate political party, which was also called the Force of Vietnamese Buddhists. The situation became somewhat ludicrous and both forces were quietly dropped.

Tri Quang thereupon tried another tack. He began to concentrate on the organization of his followers in central Vietnam. The Struggle Movement was the result. It began in Hué, spread to other parts of central Vietnam, then to Dalat, and is now established in Saigon. In all areas it contains Communist elements, and in Saigon the Vietcong pull the strings.

The leader of the Saigon group disappeared about the middle of May, and reports circulated that he had been kidnapped by the police. Two of his aides (who disappeared from Saigon a year ago to escape charges that they were involved in a peace movement) are reportedly hiding out with the Vietcong.

Tam Chau had always intended to match Tri Quang's Struggle Movement with a political group of his own, but until his resignation circumstances forced him to temporize. "You may think I am exaggerating," one Buddhist told me, "but if he does not support the Struggle Movement against Premier Ky, Tam Chau's life may even be in danger."

Jockeying for Power

Since 1963, the two monks have outdone each other in political intrigues. Tri Quang once trapped Premier Nguyen Khanh into promising him a contribution of thirty million piastres. When Khanh turned up with only five million, Tri Quang looked at the gift and commented, "You misunderstand me. I didn't ask for money, but please give it to the Van Hanh university." Khanh made the gift, but from that day Tri Quang fought to get rid of him and persuaded the Vien Hoa Dao to vote unanimously for his dismissal.

That was a Tri Quang coup, but Tam Chau has had several of his own. By committing the Vien Hoa Dao without a vote of the membership, he forced Tri Quang to participate against his will in the

campaign against the government of Khanh's successor, Tran Van Huong. With the fall of Huong, however, Tri Quang succeeded in gaining control of the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Education, and Social Affairs in the government of Huong's successor, Dr. Phan Huy Quat. Tam Chau found himself not only without influence inside the government but also with a challenge from Thien Minh, enriched by a government handout of millions of piastres. This time an expedient alliance between Tam Chau and the Catholics, who were even more fearful of Tri Quang's strength, brought the government down.

Inevitably, the rivalry between Tam Chau and Tri Quang spilled over into the Ky administration, which Tam Chau supported and Tri Quang opposed. Ky rewarded Tam Chau by sending him on a goodwill mission to Japan, Korea, and Formosa, and by contributing millions of piastres to the construction of new pagodas in Saigon. Tri Quang did not consult Tam Chau when he sent his Struggle Forces into action against the government in Danang in May. As his campaign developed, he presented Tam Chau with a petition against Ky to sign. "My friend," Tam Chau reportedly said, "you ask too much. If you continue to press me, I will split the church and form a committee against the division of the people." Tam Chau rose and left the room, banging the door behind him. It was never fully reopened.

The widening gulf between the rivals has been more of a setback for Tri Quang than for Tam Chau, but Tri Quang's hold on the Buddhists in central Vietnam remains as firm as ever and he is all-powerful in the Institute for the Clergy. He is surrounded by a small group of able monks, several of whom, the Tam Chau faction suspects, have some sort of association with the Vietcong. "If Tri Quang wants to put fifty thousand demonstrators into the streets of Hué, he can do it with a snap of his fingers," a Buddhist told me. "All together, in central Vietnam he can count on one to two million followers."

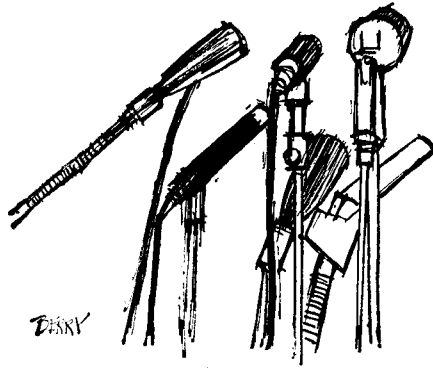
Tri Quang can just as easily keep demonstrators off the streets. I was in Hué when Premier Ky told a

group of newspapermen in the Mekong Delta that he would remain in power for another year. Although there are forty-eight separate Struggle Committees in Hué, there was not a single spontaneous protest. Tri Quang was in consultation with Thien Minh, and Tri Quang's followers knew that no move should be made until their decision was handed down.

THREE DAYS LATER I was at the Hué airport waiting for a plane, as was Thien Minh, who was surrounded by members of the various Struggle Committees. "Tri Quang has said that he gave the Americans a pledge not to hold demonstrations," one of these young men told me. "But if the Americans do not honor their pledge on elections, then Tri Quang says that he will attack the Americans not merely on policy but on grounds of imperialism." When and if that moment comes, it will be impossible to differentiate between the Struggle Forces and the Vietcong. Even if such a development were confined to central Vietnam, it would be dangerous enough. If it were to spread through all of South Vietnam, it could have disastrous consequences.

Many Buddhists in Saigon now understand this. "No one can attack Tri Quang directly, but he can be attacked through Thien Minh," said one Buddhist layman. "Arrest the Vietcong close to Thien Minh. He is vulnerable on many grounds. He is rich, powerful, and unloved. When he had difficulty in raising demonstrators in Saigon in April, he requisited hundreds from the salt market, paying them eighty piastres a day each. Don't forget if it comes to force that Tam Chau has followers who can match Thien Minh's worst efforts in Saigon. The Railway Workers Union, the most powerful of all, is under his control, and he has twenty thousand men, some of them armed and some from the Hoa Hao sect in his 'Knights to Protect the Oppressed Peoples.'"

Another Buddhist layman urged that Tam Chau should be encouraged to form a political party of his own. "Then Tri Quang will be neutralized." "Do it with money," said a third. It now appears that Tam Chau has decided to take the plunge.



Double Feature In Byrdland

JOHN I. BROOKS

PROUD old Virginia, long a symbol of political somnolence, is responding with enthusiasm this year to the rarity of a double Senatorial primary. Even more unusual, the outcome is in doubt, although one of the candidates is named Byrd.

The double election is a consequence of the retirement last November of the state's most powerful political figure of this century, Harry Flood Byrd. His son, Harry, Jr., was named to the vacated seat and must now face the voters to win the right to finish the remaining four years of his father's term. The term of Virginia's other Senator, A. Willis Robertson, expires this year, so he too is before the electorate.

Both incumbents face strong opposition in the July 12 Democratic primary, which in all likelihood will produce the winners in November's general election. Republicanism has been gaining in Virginia, but at the moment the party appears to lack attractive and willing candidates.

As recently as 1961 the Byrd-backed candidate for governor clinched the office in a primary by winning the votes of about eight per cent of the state's voting-age population. Since then, however, with the invalidation of the poll tax, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of registered voters. Negroes in particular have flocked to the registrars' offices, and the

results have been spectacular. In 1964 Lyndon Johnson carried Virginia by 77,000 votes, even though Barry Goldwater polled a majority of the white vote. The total vote in the 1964 contest was thirty-five per cent greater than it had been in 1960, when Richard Nixon defeated John Kennedy in Virginia by 42,000 votes.

All of this, plus a rapid pace of urbanization, has wrought significant changes in the state's political structure, particularly in the dominant Democratic Party. To stave off a double threat by the Republicans and an ultraconservative third party, its leaders have been forced to appeal to the Negroes, to organized labor, and to many groupings of white liberals. In short, Virginia today has all the appearances of a border state in the making.

A Seat Is Not a Throne

These developments, which have many parallels in other states of the northern and western rim of the Deep South, are not fully understood in the nation at large. For instance, shortly after Harry Byrd, Jr., was appointed to succeed his ailing father, two cartoons picturing the event appeared in newspapers across the country. In one the younger Byrd was shown being crowned by his father, while in the other the son was depicted accepting with

thanks a shiny new car labeled "Byrd Machine."

Things are not that simple in Virginia any more. The former Senator's machine, always known in his state as "the organization," is not the same oligarchy that V. O. Key, Jr., described seventeen years ago as "a political museum piece." The elder Byrd's faithful lieutenants do not "belong" to his son. The younger Byrd, now fifty-one but still known around the state as Little Harry, is a member of the inner circle but does not dominate it.

The new Senator faces a tough race for nomination. His opponent, Armistead L. Boothe, is a suave and articulate lawyer and former state senator from Alexandria who built a statewide following five years ago in a campaign for lieutenant governor. Running against Mills E. Godwin, Jr. (the present tenant in the governor's mansion), Boothe polled forty-five per cent of the vote—the highest percentage recorded for an anti-organization man during the thirty-five years of the Byrd ascendancy.

Today Boothe poses a genuine threat to Byrd. Though the old Senator's son has many friends around the state, he cannot work his will by picking up the telephone and passing to remote county court-houses what for years has been known as "the word." Some people who were devoted to the retired Senator do not have the same feeling for his son, and while few of these veteran organization men will defect to Boothe, they may not expend the campaigning energy they gave to the elder Byrd.

The difference between father and son is hard to define. The senior Byrd seemed to have more of the common touch than does his son. One thinks of Harry Byrd, Jr., as a black-tie banquet speaker, whereas the old man always was at his best at the annual picnic he gave for the faithful at his apple orchard. There the Senator would mount the back of a flatbed truck and serve up for his delighted listeners a repast of Roast Administration, with a side dish of Broiled Warren Court. He never failed to weave in humor tailored to his audience. In 1964 he said: "Deficits—you know—they are